

Aggies open Big 12 play

Baseball team looks to break out of four-game slide this weekend against 18th-ranked Baylor Bears

By DOUG FUENTES

The Battalion

Only eight games into its season, the Texas A&M baseball team has to get ready for a major test. The question remains: Is it up to the task.

Mired in a four-game slump, the Aggies start Big 12 play against one of the hottest teams in the conference, the 18th-ranked Baylor Bears.

A&M (3-5) is coming off a tough 2-1 loss to the Sam Houston State Bearkats on Tuesday in Huntsville.

Bearkats pitcher Joe Fowler shut down the Aggies, pitching a complete game and limiting the Aggies to one run on two hits.

A&M freshman pitcher Matt Farnum also pitched well, allowing only two runs on six hits in 7 1/3 innings, but he was the victim of Aggie errors.

Both of Farnum's runs were unearned, thanks to two A&M errors in the eighth inning.

Errors have been the Aggies' Achilles' heel in the early going,

making 24 in eight games, and 15 during the current four-game losing streak.

"Hitting streaks are contagious and so are fielding streaks," said A&M pitching coach Jim Lawler. "Once somebody boots a ball, the next guy doesn't want to do it and all of a sudden he's putting too much pressure on himself."

The Aggies will be short one pitcher this weekend. Junior Khalid Ballouli will not pitch because of a tender arm ever since his start against Arkansas State two weekends ago, Lawler said.

He attempted to throw during practice Wednesday, but did not feel quite right in his throwing.

As a result, A&M will juggle its rotation. Sophomore Todd Deininger will start tonight, but the order is unknown after that. Juniors Brian Strelitz and Joe Hart and sophomore Steven Ponder are all candidates to get a start, but their status depends on if they are used in relief early in the series.

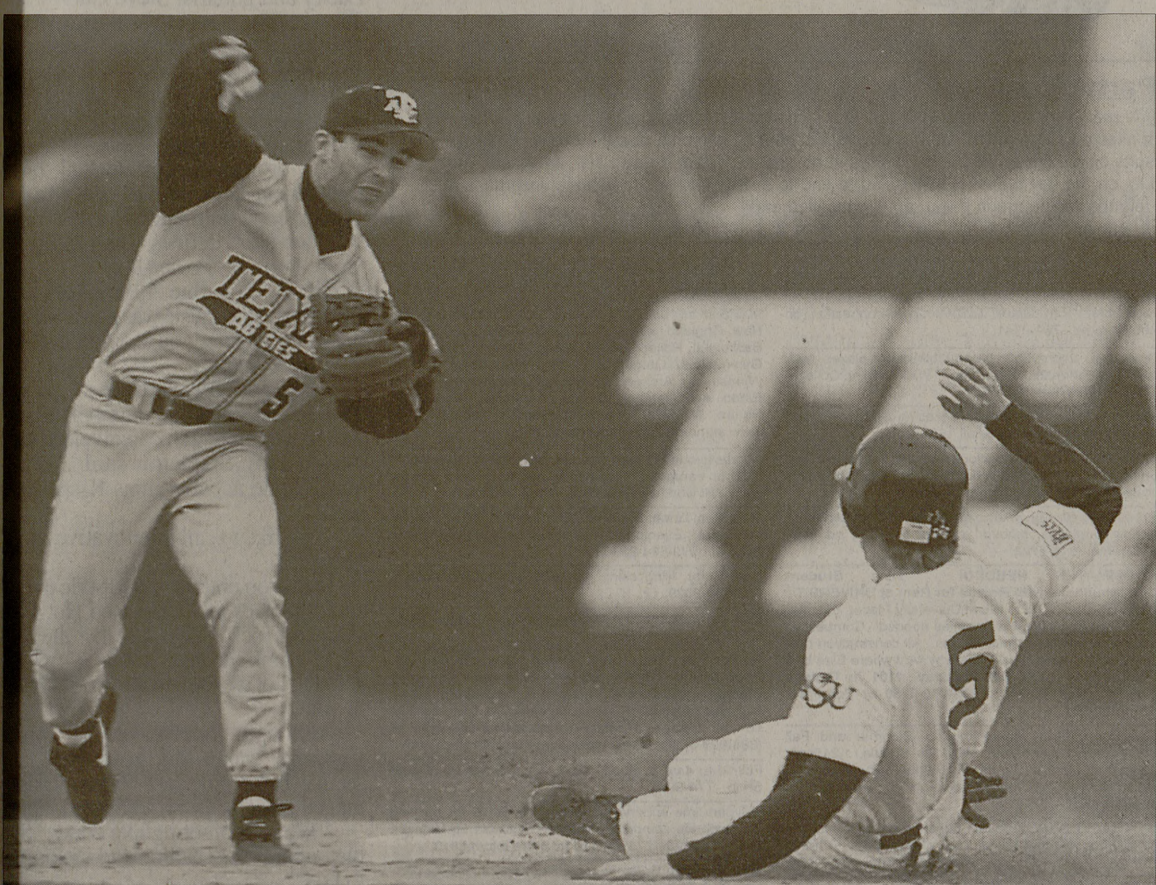
"You have to use your best pitchers in a conference game," Lawler said. "I'm not going to save two guys for Sunday, when it might be an extra-inning game on Friday night."

If the Aggies are in a slump, the Bears (9-3) are on a hot streak. They have won nine of their first 12 games and lead the Big 12 in ERA at 1.95. They also are the best fielding team in the Big 12, with a .979 fielding percentage.

Baylor is coming off a 13-2 victory over UT-San Antonio Tuesday. Catcher Kelly Shoppach led the Bears with a two-run home run. Shoppach leads the team in batting, with a .476 average, and in RBIs, with 14.

"If you look at the Big 12, we're probably playing the hottest team right now, as far as starting the season," Lawler said. "Which isn't ideal, but if you turn around and win a couple of games, it changes everything."

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A&M junior second baseman Ty Garner attempts to turn a double play in the Aggies' series against

Arkansas State two weekends ago. The Aggies begin Big 12 play this weekend against the Baylor Bears.

CHAD ADAMS/THE BATTALION

Ags finish up home schedule

A&M, Tech battle to stay out of Big 12 cellar as Aggies host Red Raiders at Reed Arena Saturday

By JASON LINCOLN

The Battalion

If the Texas A&M men's basketball team wishes to finish anywhere but last place in conference standings, Saturday is a must-win situation when Texas Tech enters Reed Arena.

With three games remaining in the regular season, the Aggies are

looking for a late surge, something that has failed them during game time as they slipped behind in two-straight conference matches down the stretch.

But the possibility is there. Texas A&M will face its longest stretch of teams in the lower tier of the conference standings.

Tech merely kicks it off. The Aggies then hit the road against

Nebraska and Baylor to end the season.

None of the final opponents are over .500 in Big 12 action, while the Aggies have already downed their two South division rivals in the first matchup, defeating Baylor, 73-69, and Tech, 72-70.

However, Tech is the most vulnerable of the Aggies' final three opponents with just three conference wins this season.

Combined with A&M's home court advantage and previous victory, the game is a must-have for the Aggies before hitting the road for the rest of the season.

In the previous matchup between the two teams, the Aggies led by as much as 13 points with

6:27 remaining before Tech closed the game on a 15-4, falling just two points shy of the win.

All four points came from free throws as A&M went cold from the floor.

Nick Anderson led the Aggies with 18 points.

Anderson is a Big 12 Freshman of the Year candidate and currently ranks second in league scoring by freshman, with 9.8 points per game.

Only Iowa State freshman Jake Sullivan is averaging better, with 11.9 points per game.

Bernard King is also up for postseason hardware as an All-Big 12 candidate.

King's 18.9 point-per-game stat leads the team and ranks sec-

ond in the Big 12.

On Saturday against Oklahoma State, King posted 25 points with eight assists.

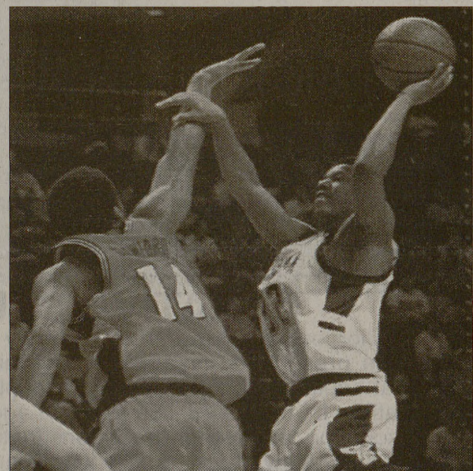
King scored in double figures 17 straight times, falling short of the mark just twice this year.

Texas Tech snapped a seven-game losing streak with a 65-64 win over Nebraska on Wednesday.

Andy Ellis hit a basket with just four seconds remaining, giving Tech its third win of the season.

Ellis led the Raiders with 14 points. Cliff Owens scored 12. Against the Aggies, Owens posted 17 points and Ellis had 13.

After finishing the stretch of conference play, the Aggies will travel to Kansas City for the Big 12 Tournament March 8-11.



A&M sophomore guard Bernard King goes up for a jumper against OSU.

KRISTI HINES/THE BATTALION

Freshman Anderson beginning to play up to high expectations, learning determination, proving himself to Aggie teammates

By JASON LINCOLN

The Battalion

As voting time draws near, A&M freshman forward Nick Anderson is making himself hard to ignore.

The preseason pick for Big 12 Freshman of the Year is finally showing why he was chosen after leading his team into its only two conference wins of the season.

After posting team highs in scoring against Baylor University and Texas Tech with 14 and 18 points, Anderson has taken his offensive production to the level the Aggies expected when they signed one of the most highly regarded players in the history of the program.

But with just three games remaining and Texas A&M buried in the cellar of league standings, Anderson's chances for frosh of the year are limited.

Anderson is only averaging 9.8 points per game. Meanwhile, Iowa State freshman Jake Sullivan has posted 11.9 points per game.

But recently the story has been different for Anderson, who found his rhythm in recent games. During Texas A&M's last five games, Anderson is av-

eraging 15.6 points per game while tying his career high with 22 points against Missouri.

What matters most to Anderson is winning. He came to A&M to win, and with Anderson's recent improvement the step up was evident in his attitude.

Anderson thought, he has had to prove himself from day one, even to his teammates.

"They thought I had no shot," he said. "All they thought I could do was dunk. I feel pretty comfortable shooting out there. When I get it, I shoot it."

Anderson quickly proved he had the midrange shot. However, injury problems forced him to play inside and mimic the stereotype his teammates had originally. But when he does move outside, it becomes evident that is where his future lies.

Much of Anderson's early season problems came as he guarded players bigger than he was and picked up early fouls.

"I think I can play on the wing, but since everybody's hurt, I got to play down low," Anderson said. "It's kind of hard because they're kind of big, and I

just get in foul trouble. How I get in foul trouble, I don't know.

"When I get my first two fouls my mind starts thinking 'don't get another foul, don't get another foul.' I watch it on game tapes and after two and three fouls I just get slow."

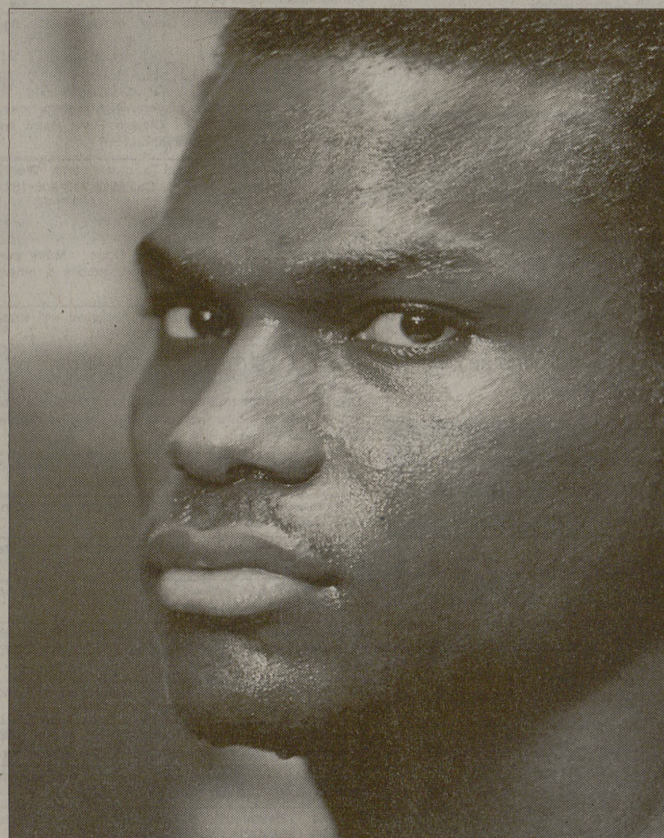
Anderson has learned to deal with it in recent weeks.

In addition to the more physical and talented level of play, Anderson had to learn to deal with defeat. Anderson helped Louisiana's Southern University Lab High School win four consecutive state championships.

At Texas A&M, Anderson's season has been anything but quiet for the determined freshman. In an exhibition game during the preseason, Anderson got a wake-up call when he was elbowed to the throat and a foul was not called. Anderson's complaint to the official was met with little understanding.

"He told me 'stop whining like a little baby.' I told him 'I'm the best baby you're ever going to see.'"

Anderson is trying to prove it and earn the title as the conference's best baby.



A&M freshman forward Nick Anderson is the second-leading freshman scorer in the Big 12, averaging 9.8 points per game.

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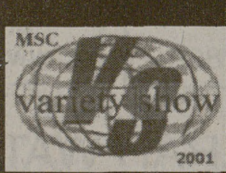
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